

Restoring the River, Regenerating Community within the Santa Fe River Watershed Workplan

Restoring the River, Regenerating Community will hold four meeting-retreats over the course of one year at which stakeholders, with professional mediation support, water rights professionals, Santa Fe Watershed Association personnel, and local County land use and planning staff will discuss and plan the equitable reallocation of water rights. Other project funds will be utilized for community-based discussion of restoration projects, such as erosion control projects, eradication of harmful invasive species and appropriate water management techniques. These projects will revitalize the community bonds that are essential to acequia culture. Between meeting-retreats, more frequent work meetings will take place between parties, including small group and larger group meetings; research will be carried out and reported; community outreach will be initiated and ongoing. These meetings will run on two tracks reflecting the dual goals of the project: one track dedicated to water rights allocation among stakeholders, the other focused on river corridor restoration topics, with a broader community participation. A QAPP will be produced to program, record and track ameliorative water quality and river corridor restoration efforts for Restoring the River, Regenerating Community; it will be shared with stakeholders and the public and evaluated at regular intervals by professional support partners.

Northern New Mexico villages and settlements were traditionally built on an acequia system, using ditches to carry water to inhabitants. This system was beneficial both to the citizens and the local ecosystem, promoting closeness, tradition and the growth of local plant genera. However, as the city of Santa Fe took over the water that fed these ditches, villages were left with effluent water filled with chemicals and were unable to grow the crops that had supported their families for generations. Now, the Santa Fe Watershed Association, partnering with a group of villages including Agua Fria, La Cienega, La Cienegilla, and La Bajada, through the Santa Fe River Traditional Communities Consortium, Acequia Agua Fria, and Santa Fe County, plans to work to reallocate the water to their respective communities, thus stimulating tradition and benefitting the local ecosystem. All these villages lie within Santa Fe County, New Mexico in the 87507 and 87508 zip codes.

This project is strongly related to the 1970 Clean Air and Water Act, as, to quote a citizen of Agua Fria,

“These regulations prohibited the release of water from a public sewerage system without it being 99.9% pure. The City of Santa Fe was releasing its effluent water from its Siler Road Treatment plant since 1945 into the acequias connecting to Acequia Madre and Acequia de los Pinos coming into Agua Fria Village. The City closed the fresh water coming out of the City’s three reservoirs into the acequia system and then sent effluent water to Agua Fria Village starting in 1945 until 1970. At first this ‘liquid fertilizer’ worked wonders, then dry-cleaning fluid and toilet bowl cleaners started to be commonly used in the 1960’s. Crops watered by the effluent were growing only three inches tall. Pinto beans had to be washed and drained over twenty times to get rid of the sewer smell. St. Vincent Hospital also washed out its X-Ray machine into the sewer system to potentially bring radioactive elements into the acequia system. Many fields just became sterile and the People said: ‘No Mas.’”

The affected communities are predominantly Hispanic or Latino (79.23% of Agua

Fria, 70.80% of La Cienega citizens are Hispanic or Latino). The consortium of traditional historic communities at the west boundaries of the city of Santa Fe, along the Santa Fe River, includes deep-rooted Pueblo Indian residents and Land Grant Hispanic farming villages established in the seventeenth century. These are historically sustainable communities living in a challenging, high desert environment in which access to clean water for drinking, irrigating crops and serving livestock is crucial to survival; the Santa Fe River is the most important source of water in an area with scant rainfall. Today these communities have high levels of poverty reflected in federal census tract figures. Dropping water tables and degraded water quality from upstream urban impacts endanger traditional farming activities relying on a healthy river corridor. The project aims to address inequities by bringing stakeholders together for a series of meetings to begin to settle water allocation issues; it also aims to clarify specific environmental improvement actions along the affected river corridor to support and maintain clean water in the river to meet local human, plant and wildlife needs. A healthy, living river, in an environment characterized by native plants and animals, meeting responsible, sustainable agricultural practice needs, is the goal.

Established in 1997, the Santa Fe Watershed Association works to return the Santa Fe River to a living river, from Lake Peak to the Rio Grande, balancing human uses with natural resource protection within the Santa Fe River watershed. The Santa Fe Watershed Association has supported the conservation and environmental efforts of local communities located along the Santa Fe River since its inception; in the past few years we have given new attention to the middle and lower stretches of the river. In particular, we are advocating restoration of consistent flow to the river to support vegetation and wildlife habitat, while recharging the groundwater. We are striving to create a sense of responsibility and common interest among all residents of the watershed. Additionally, our education programs have provided opportunities for locals to experience the Santa Fe River and its watershed through both school and public programs. Programs are designed to highlight a variety of ecosystems and explore ways that humans impact water and water impacts humans.

The Santa Fe Watershed Association and the community of Santa Fe won a significant victory with the passage of the Target Flow for a Living River Ordinance on February 29th, 2012. After more than a decade, and five years of intense advocacy by SFWA, a standing-room only audience witnessed a “watershed moment” when the City Council unanimously voted to by-pass 1,000 acre feet of water into the Santa Fe River on wet or normal years. We view this as a giant first step to reviving the Santa Fe River from the dry ditch that we often see and have seen for years, to a flowing, vibrant perennial stream that brings life to our community. Our continuing dream is a fully flowing, meandering, tree-lined stream where children can play, and one in which all of us can enjoy. The beauty of this river will also have a practical side. The restored river and its tributary arroyos will retain more water during floods and keep more water in the aquifer where it can be recovered through wells. Ultimately, a healthy river system would deliver water all the way to the Rio Grande.

Of crucial import is the agricultural community downstream of Santa Fe on the lower end of the watershed. This traditionally Hispanic area has cultivated food for the last 400 years, and continues to do so, perpetuating the traditional acequia system to irrigate their crops. They rely upon water from the river which mostly is sourced from the City’s waste-water treatment

facility. The Santa Fe River Trail Corridor Project is designed not only as a multi-purpose trail but as a major restoration of the river from Camino Alire to NM State Highway 599. This is a collaborative project supported by both the City and County of Santa Fe, and the Santa Fe Watershed Association. River restoration is an integral part of the Trail Corridor Project. The channel and banks in many sections of the river are in poor condition. Erosion has caused steep banks with few plants and the riverbed has many failed grade-control structures. The goal is to have the river meander where possible and to use bioengineering techniques such as boulder drop structures and cross vanes to slow the water down and limit erosion. These approaches will also help increase aquifer recharge and support plants and trees.

Restoring the River, Regenerating Community fits both our organizational capacity and programmatic goals.

Andy Otto - Executive Director: Over the past 35 years Andy has worked for a variety of non-profit organizations in areas ranging from promoting State Park solvency, public access to public waters, to environmental advocacy. Andy earned his B.S. in Watershed Management from the University of Arizona in 1973. While in California (1974-2010), he initiated a “Legacy Trail” to run the length of the Truckee River through the Town of Truckee. During that time he also started his own commercial real estate business as an owner, manager, and broker. An experienced fundraiser, event organizer, and project manager, he has served on the Board of the North Tahoe Fine Arts Council, the Sierra State Parks Foundation, the Truckee Trails Foundation, the Our Truckee River Legacy Foundation (Past Chairman), the Rotary District 5190 Lieutenant Governor position, and the Truckee Rotary (Past President). Andy’s experience creating collaborative efforts between diverse stakeholders will prove beneficial in this endeavor as businesses and environmental organizations reach toward similar goals of reducing pollution impacts and creating a healthier place to live. His experience securing and implementing federal grants spans his five year non-profit experience as a development director, program director and executive director.

Raquel Baca-Tompson, Office Administrator: After working in corporate Human Resources for over nine years Raquel came to work for the Santa Fe Watershed Association, and never left. In addition to a Human Resources background, Raquel worked as an assistant to the Director of Shidoni Foundry, Inc.; she holds a certification in fitness training; and has volunteered for Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Northern New Mexico. She has worked as the administrative assistant and membership coordinator for SFWA for ten years. Raquel’s experience and record of administering federal grants in these years is impeccable.

Santa Fe Watershed Association Experience:

The Santa Fe Watershed Association is well experienced in securing and implementing federal grants, especially around issues of watershed management, and in communicating with a diverse array of interests. From overseeing the development of a Water Restoration Action Strategy in 2001 (funded by EPA 319 funds), to collaboration with the City of Santa Fe and the US Forest Service on a \$7,000,000 thinning project in the upper watershed of the Santa Fe River, the Watershed Association has shown leadership in working constructively with other environmental groups, local government, businesses, and citizen groups. For the past 7 years, the Watershed

Association has led the effort to develop a comprehensive management plan for the upper watershed, featuring an innovative financial arrangement whereby the beneficiaries of good management practices (the water consumers of Santa Fe) would contribute to the financial costs of managing the forests of the upper watershed. This “payment for ecosystem services” plan is supported by both the US Forest Service and the City of Santa Fe. In our seventeen year history we have completed 13 EPA funded projects totaling more than \$2,000,000 dollars. The projects were both planning and implementation projects, specifically in river/land restoration and watershed planning. All projects were fully reported on, some included completion of a white paper, and all were completed on time.

Our past performance in reporting on outputs and outcomes reflects our commitment to selecting and pursuing tightly-focused projects with high potential for garnering community support, eliciting volunteer efforts and outreach that significantly amplify funding effects, including awarded grant funds. Please view our website and contact our office for further details.